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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Humanitarian assistance and reconstruction of Liberia**

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted to the General Assembly pursuant to its request in resolution 63/136. The report provides a status update and an analysis of the current challenges to the delivery of both humanitarian relief and rehabilitation assistance by the United Nations and its partners to Liberia. In particular, it looks at major developments in consolidating peace and security, revitalizing the economy and strengthening governance and the rule of law, as well as major developments in food security, disaster risk reduction, gender equality and the empowerment of women.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to the request made by the General Assembly in its resolution 63/136. The report provides a status update and an analysis of the current challenges to the delivery of both humanitarian relief and rehabilitation assistance by the United Nations and its partners to Liberia. In particular, it looks at major developments in consolidating peace and security, revitalizing the economy and strengthening governance and the rule of law, as well as food security, disaster risk reduction, gender equality and the empowerment of women. The report covers the period from September 2008 to August 2010.

II. Review of major developments

2. In Liberia, the United Nations system is represented by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), as well as 16 specialized agencies, funds and programmes and the World Bank. All United Nations operations in Liberia are aligned with the national poverty reduction strategy, focusing on the four main areas of consolidating peace and security, revitalizing the economy, strengthening governance and the rule of law and rehabilitating infrastructure and delivering basic services.

3. Immediate humanitarian needs are further decreasing, and attention continues to be focused on sustainable recovery. The presence and increased visibility of peacekeeping troops associated with UNMIL continue to help stabilize the security situation. The main challenges facing the country are now reconstruction and stability. The United Nations is supporting the Government in taking on responsibilities as humanitarian programmes end. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees continues to assist 11,000 people. Identifying appropriate and durable solutions for these people remains a challenge. Over 64,000 refugees remain in countries of asylum, while more than 169,000 have returned to Liberia.

4. Important national reconciliation processes have concluded during the reporting period. In July 2009, the national demobilization, disarmament, rehabilitation and reintegration programme was declared completed, and in December the Truth and Reconciliation Commission issued its final report. Also in 2009, the Government, which is a signatory of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), and its international partners considered the internal displacement situation to be over.

5. Despite advances in human rights protection, several concerns persist, owing to significant capacity and resource constraints in the legal, judicial and corrections sectors, including the juvenile justice system. Rape and other sexual crimes remain prevalent, as does the traditional practice of female genital mutilation. Children continue to suffer from various forms of violence at home, at school or in their community. The adjudication of disputes through trials by ordeal is deeply entrenched and continues to be widely practised with impunity.

III. Consolidating peace and security

6. The Government and its partners have come to a widely shared understanding that peacebuilding in Liberia embodies a vision of a society that is peaceful,

respects and protects the rights of citizens and ensures that disputes and tensions, which are normal in any society, are handled in a way that prevents their escalation into organized violence. Current efforts of the United Nations focus on strengthening long-term peace and reconciliation, reforming the security sector and supporting the implementation of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Strengthening peace and reconciliation

7. In October 2007, I deemed Liberia eligible to receive funding under the second window of the Peacebuilding Fund. The Fund, which is co-managed by the Government and UNMIL, allocated $15 million among 25 projects supporting the peacebuilding process. The Liberia Peacebuilding Fund priority plan of 2008, the result of a joint analysis by the Government and the United Nations, was revised in March 2009 in order to better respond to demand, improve geographical distribution and fill the funding gaps of activities not covered by other donors.

8. The projects systematically addressed conflict drivers and provided opportunities for young people to develop and acquire social skills towards maintaining peace and security; diminished violence in former "hot spots", particularly in remote Grand Gedeh and Nimba counties; increased the number of ex-combatants taking up honest livings; contributed to a reported reduction in illicit mining; increased knowledge and awareness among the public about the rule of law and legal rights; supported the settlement of numerous land cases in courts, reducing the rate of land-related violence; and supported the arrests of suspected criminals.

9. Most projects have been efficiently managed. In general, recipient agencies have provided adequate support to the projects and were transparent and accountable in dealing with their activities. Overall, the projects benefited from high local participation in project design, implementation and participation.

10. Nevertheless, monitoring of the projects could be strengthened. Project visits remain insufficient and are particularly difficult throughout the rainy season. Some initiatives could benefit from stronger Government support, such as the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission and the sexual and gender-based crimes unit. There have also been instances of projects lacking sufficient funds, activities being too fragmented and projects that could have better taken into account existing structures. Gaps also continue to exist in strengthening State capacity for peace consolidation, especially in rural areas, and in supporting vulnerable youth, reintegrating former combatants and providing psychosocial support.

Security sector reform

11. Security agencies have made progress in meeting the deliverables set under the security pillar of the poverty reduction strategy. A new county security mechanism was officially launched in December 2009 to enhance security policy coordination at the county level. Despite some promising advances, the implementation of the national security strategy faces a number of challenges. The principal among these challenges concerns the key legislation governing the new security architecture, the Liberia security reform and intelligence bill. This bill has yet to be presented to the legislature, thus impeding effective security and intelligence coordination and creating a major obstacle to the establishment and consolidation of the overall security architecture.

12. To support collaboration and cohesiveness for security sector reform, the United Nations finalized the development of a Justice and Security Trust Fund. This trust fund supports capacity development in all security-related sectors in a comprehensive manner, and is in line with the framework of the national poverty reduction strategy and the national security strategy of Liberia. The Justice and Security Trust Fund is a five-year project that allows the United Nations and development partners, as UNMIL draws down, to build up the capacity of three key agencies, namely the Liberia National Police, the Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation and the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization.

13. During the reporting period, the United Nations has bolstered the capacity and functionality of national institutions involved in security sector reform through the construction of 11 police county headquarters with women and child protection units and five police barracks that enabled police to be deployed outside of the capital, Monrovia. The national police academy has trained 4,000 officers since 2004. The Emergency Response Unit has 335 officers, including 4 women officers, and was provided with 34 critically needed patrol vehicles and funds for supporting the training of recruits and the development of a new gender-sensitive curriculum.

Demobilization, disarmament, rehabilitation and reintegration programme

14. On 21 July 2009, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf declared the national demobilization, disarmament, rehabilitation and reintegration programme in Liberia closed. This five-year programme was funded primarily through the multi-donor trust fund for demobilization, disarmament, rehabilitation and reintegration managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and targeted some 5,179 beneficiaries, of which 38 per cent were female former combatants. Throughout the programme, beneficiaries received agricultural, vocational and computer training, as well as career counselling based on identified economic opportunities at the respective district level. In its final phase, the programme successfully pioneered public-private partnerships and provided apprenticeship opportunities, as well as long-term employment opportunities, for selected beneficiaries. The final phase also put a particular emphasis on psychosocial counselling.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia

15. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, established in 2005 as an integral part of the peace process set up by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed at Accra, concluded its mandate during the reporting period and submitted a final report in December 2009. Throughout the peace process, UNDP was the Commission's primary partner in mobilizing resources, including through a multi-donor funding instrument.

16. In 2009, with support from the Peacebuilding Fund, the United Nations facilitated the funding of five regional consultations and one major national reconciliation conference that directly supported the conclusion of the Commission's work. More than 350 county delegates participated and discussed the four pillars of the Commission's thematic areas — amnesty, reconciliation, reparation and prosecution — and provided their perspectives on the Commission's recommendations on peace and reconciliation in Liberia.

17. This process was followed by a national conference in which more than 500 delegates from the 15 counties and the diaspora gathered to participate in

discussions on sustaining peace and reconciliation in Liberia. The conference's declaration, the Virginia Declaration, calls for a "new Liberia through reconciliation and justice". The declaration provided 38 recommendations to be considered in the Commission's final recommendations.

18. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report provides a historical analysis of the conflict in Liberia and its root causes, and lists 142 recommendations on the sanctioning and prosecution of crimes committed during the conflict, public integrity, corruption, human rights, economic empowerment, good governance, national identity, repatriation of unlawfully acquired monies and reparations, which are intended to resolve past conflicts as part of a national progression towards lasting peace and reconciliation. In addition, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommends the establishment of traditional truth-seeking and reconciliation processes through a "palava hut" system, the establishment of a reparations trust fund, the observance of a national memorial and unification day and the protection and promotion of the rights of women and children.

19. The United Nations also facilitated the publication and dissemination of the Commission's final report in 2009, and raised awareness on its key findings with a consortium of some 18 civil society organizations.

IV. Strengthening governance and the rule of law

Strengthening the rule of law and the administration of justice

20. Strengthening the rule of law and the administration of justice, in close partnership with the Ministry of Justice, is a key focus of the work of the United Nations in Liberia. Largely funded by the Peacebuilding Fund, key interventions include providing technical advisory services to the Ministry of Justice to improve prosecution services, ensuring that human rights is mainstreamed into rule of law through the training of Ministry staff and providing logistical support to the roving prosecutors unit.

21. Over the past two years, the United Nations has contributed to the strengthening of the legal system and judicial institutions by supporting the establishment of a sexual and gender-based crimes unit within the Ministry of Justice and by providing legal support to the law enforcement authority in four counties. Concerning the creation of a fair and equitable justice system, the United Nations continues to provide support to strengthening the judiciary through the training of public defenders and the provision of vehicles and equipment for their deployment and mobility, especially in the counties.

V. Revitalizing the economy

Community-based recovery

22. Despite substantial recovery efforts, Liberia remains one of the poorest countries in the world: 68 per cent of the rural population and 55 per cent of the urban population lives on less than $1 a day, while 56 per cent of the rural population and 29 per cent of the urban population falls below the extreme poverty line, lacking the necessary means to meet the cost of basic food needs.

23. Throughout 2009 and 2010, the United Nations continued to be deeply engaged in supporting vulnerable rural communities that have little access to basic services. Working closely with line ministries, the focus has been on building schools, clinics, water wells and pumps for potable consumption, roads and bridges, as well as markets and smallholder agricultural production centres, particularly in counties where the UNDP Human Poverty Index indicates some of the highest levels of vulnerability. Since January 2009, 20 educational facilities, 15 health facilities, 6 markets, 14 food security structures (seed storage and agroprocessing facilities), 200 km of roads to connect farmers to markets and 22 bridges have been completed. The United Nations also provided microfinance support to 22,000 beneficiaries through three microfinance institutions in Liberia, which enabled the most vulnerable beneficiaries to start up small enterprises across the country.

24. The global financial crisis continued to affect Liberia's economy, particularly in the rubber sector, resulting in decreased exports, increased rural unemployment and delays in foreign investment. Growth in gross domestic product fell from 7.1 per cent in 2008 to 4.6 per cent in 2009. The rate of inflation stood at 7.6 per cent at the end of 2009, increasing from 6.8 per cent in the first quarter of the year because of a rise in the price of fuel and other imported goods.

VI. Food security, disaster risk reduction and preparedness

Food security

25. Food production is slowly but progressively improving in post-conflict Liberia, with abandoned land increasingly being cultivated. Nevertheless, low agricultural productivity makes Liberia heavily dependent on imports. The global food hikes in food prices, particularly for rice, which is a major staple in Liberia, had a significant impact on food security, particularly among the urban and non-producing rural population, which make up two thirds of the country. In response, the Government of Liberia, together with the United Nations, formulated a joint programme on food security and nutrition for 2008 to 2011. This joint programme, which is part of the wider national strategy for food security and nutrition, provides a coherent response to the problem of food insecurity and malnutrition, avoiding duplication of efforts and maximizing the impact of interventions in supporting national objectives.

26. The programme adopted a two-pronged approach, offering emergency preparedness and response to the short-term crisis in food prices and medium-term support to the relevant priorities of the Government. In particular, the programme supports access to markets and factors of production to increase local and national food supply; provides access to basic services; strengthens safety nets, including by improving school attendance rates through, among other things, the provision of hot meals for children in primary school; promotes agriculture-related employment for women and youth; and supports nutrition interventions, including measures such as the training of health and community workers in the promotion of infant and young child feeding and nutritional practices.

Disaster risk reduction and preparedness

27. The United Nations continues to be the lead partner of the Government of Liberia in building a national contingency plan and response capacity for seasonal flash floods and other related natural disasters.

28. Following the flash floods of 2007 (and to a lesser extent in 2008), UNDP worked with the Liberian Red Cross Society and the National Disaster Relief Commission to pilot the building of capacities of local communities in flood-prone areas of greater Monrovia, providing them with training and equipment. These efforts are complemented by the provision of technical advisory services to the Government of Liberia for the development of its first national disaster management policy, which establishes an institutional framework for disaster risk reduction and community-based capacities for needs assessments in disaster situations.

29. Following a high-level disaster risk reduction sensitization and advocacy workshop for cabinet ministers, legislators, directors and presidents of universities in March 2010 in Monrovia, UNDP signed a project cooperation agreement with the Liberian Red Cross Society to establish and train networks of women throughout Liberia in disaster risk reduction. A nationwide disaster risk assessment, as well as vulnerability and hazard mapping, are also currently under way.

30. Furthermore, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), with United Nations support, has selected Liberia as one of the four pilot countries to be part of the systematic inventory and evaluation for risk assessment (SIERA) project to be implemented in the West African subregion. The secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, in partnership with the World Bank Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, has also contributed to this process through its technical assistance to ECOWAS. The project will help assess the implementation of disaster risk reduction measures, data and information availability, the institutional framework and national capabilities. On this basis, the Government can define the scope and context of the disaster risk assessment and work out a realistic implementation strategy and plan.

VII. Striving for gender equality and the economic empowerment of women

31. The joint programme of the Government of Liberia and the United Nations to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, launched in 2008, has contributed to strengthening redress mechanisms and structures and systems to curb the incidence of such violence. During the first phase of the programme, from 2008 to 2010, support was provided in the following areas: psychosocial; health care; legal redress; security and protection; and establishment of an effective coordination mechanism. More than $11 million has been made available for the implementation of the programme.

32. The Government of Liberia, in collaboration with the United Nations and other national and international partners, has succeeded to a certain extent in meeting the multifaceted challenge of sexual and gender-based violence over the past two years. The United Nations refurbished 12 health facilities, provided rape and post-exposure prophylaxis kits, trained trainers for clinical management of rape and equipped facilities with medical reporting forms to facilitate prosecution of rape cases across the country. Nevertheless, while there has been a notable increase in access to services, medical services were accessed within 72 hours in only 20 per cent of all reported rape cases. Despite some significant achievements, challenges persist in accessing services in rural areas because of inadequate medical facilities at the

community level and the lack of retention of qualified health professionals, compounded by inadequate and weak infrastructure in counties.

33. In the justice sector, the institutional response to incidences of sexual and gender-based violence, particularly at the national level, was improved by the establishment of a sexual and gender-based crimes unit and a criminal court dedicated solely to rape cases. Support to judicial institutions in counties, in the form of consistent monitoring and tracking of sexual and gender-based violence cases, has increased the number of cases on the docket and thus improved access to justice. Even though the capacities of several national- and county-level judicial institutions were enhanced as a result of the interventions under the joint programme, successful adjudication of cases continues to be a challenge, primarily because of the still persistent culture of impunity, the tendency to settle cases the "family way", inadequate logistics and infrastructure, low quality of investigation and limited capacity of the members of jury boards.

34. Coordinated efforts have ensured a collaborative development of national standard operating procedures for sexual and gender-based violence and safe homes, a Government-led development of a referral pathway for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence to access services and a joint monitoring system. The principle of zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse by the authorities has been reinforced in all border counties by the training of border security personnel in collaboration with the Government, the United Nations and the communities. Participation of women traders in the training of security personnel in border counties on gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse helped highlight issues these women face while crossing the border.

35. The second phase of the joint programme is being planned, with equal importance attached to prevention mechanisms. Adequate and sustained funding from donors will be essential to sustain the achievements made in the first phase, to effectively implement the programme to curb the incidence of sexual and gender-based violence and to improve the quality and access of survivors to services.